

66 "Education For All By The Year 2000"

UNICEF has participated in several meetings and seminars on literacy and adult education and in preparing the guidelines for further discussion and consensus building in a serious attempt to create the motivation and momentum for establishing a programme of compulsory primary education throughout the whole of Bangladesh. As there is a directive from the government in support of this programme, there is considerable hope for its success but, if for any reason government services are found lacking, the poor, unlike the educated class, will not be as inclined to invest their own resources in education for the very simple reason that they cannot afford to do so.

As already there is a strong compulsion to send children out to work to supplement family incomes it would take very little to sabotage even the best intentions which can end only in disastrous consequences for children—and their education. Obviously then it is hoped that in time this programme will meet with success just as it is hoped it will also be effective in reducing child labour. However, nobody can possibly doubt it will be a continued uphill task despite the fact that there are many examples of countries which have been able to establish a successful system of compulsory education with seemingly little difficulty and there is no reason why this cannot be achieved here too.

With the government's goal for achieving education for all by the year 2000 still on track, as evidenced by the introduction of more practically based lessons in those subjects of importance to real life situations, Bangladesh is likely to succeed in its plans for expanding existing education activities within the country. For universal primary education has remained a major theme of the government which, with the support of UNICEF and non-government organisations, can only end in success.

However the government recognises the importance of continuing to use the non-formal approach to supplement the official programme by providing learning opportunities to girls in the interim period, at least until the formal system is adequately able to meet the demand. Creative innovations like that introduced by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in its non-formal education project are, therefore, being encouraged and, by giving priority to primary education and education for girls and women, they are helping achieve the goal.

UNICEF have already prepared gender sensitive curricula to minimise problems and social trauma but stronger emphasis must be placed on providing more creative ways of bringing basic education services to the poor, particularly those in difficulty to reach communities. UNICEF has already been active in ensuring schools are located near communities in Bangladesh and new literacy activities, integrated adult and children's literacy programmes, which includes reading, writing, numeracy and basic knowledge on health and nutrition, have resulted in a positive response from communities.

As a result, the target of achieving literacy by the year 2000 now seems less formidable than before and, given determination, it is believed it can be achieved within the time frame, provided the political will is sustained and maintained. However, while accepting this will all take time, a firm policy must be as firmly enforced for those failing to complete a full term of school must be persuaded to stay there. Making primary education compulsory under the law may however be the only way this can be achieved, for children must be engaged full time in the process of acquiring a basic education rather than left roaming on the streets or being sent out to labour at onerous tasks.

Although it will obviously take a great deal of time for people to adjust to the reality, when they understand they have no other choice but to send their children to school, they will accept it as a matter of course in much the same way British people accepted it when school became compulsory there. This is of course, an issue of political will and only economic farsightedness will win the day for the time has long passed when policy decisions and actions can be permitted to fail to measure up to the seriousness of the situation.

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